

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	2234
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	ACCORD
Titel:	Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas
Udgivet:	12. marts 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	15. juni 2026

Document #2137888

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Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas

Background information

Collection of information on developments concerning the SDF and Kurdish-controlled areas

In January 2026, the conflict between the Syrian transitional government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalated. This was triggered by the expiry of a deadline set by the transitional government for the integration of the SDF into state structures and the government's declared goal of regaining complete territorial control over north-eastern Syria ([DW, 20 January 2026](#)).

Fighting in Aleppo and displacement of the civilian population

In early January, intense fighting broke out in the predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo between government troops, pro-government militias and SDF-affiliated forces ([MEI, 13 January 2026](#)). On 10 January, Kurdish police forces were withdrawn from the last remaining Kurdish neighbourhood and troops of the Syrian transitional government took control of the entire city of Aleppo. Several thousand Kurds fled the city to Afrin and to Kurdish-controlled areas east of the Euphrates ([Schmidinger, 23 January 2026](#)). By the end of January, the situation in the previously contested districts had stabilised. Ninety per cent of those who had been displaced had returned, and the destroyed infrastructure was being repaired. A continuing

challenge in the city and the surrounding area of Aleppo is the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) left behind by SDF fighters ([MEI, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Expansion of the offensive in north-eastern Syria and support for the transitional government by Arab tribes

On 16 January, the Transitional Ministry of Defence announced an operation to capture Deir Hafer and Maskana, parts of the last SDF-held areas in the east of Aleppo province. Within less than 24 hours, pro-government forces took control of both locations and expanded their offensive to areas of Raqqa province and other SDF-controlled regions in northeastern Syria. On 17 January, pro-government forces, including units from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior as well as allied tribal militias, launched an offensive from the directions of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. By the end of the same day, the Al-Schamiyeh region in the west of Raqqa province had fallen, and shortly afterwards, pro-government forces began advancing on the city of Raqqa. In the province of Deir Ezzor, tribal fighters attacked SDF positions even before the transitional government forces arrived. The rapid advance was aided by the considerable weakening of the SDF as a result of desertions and by the support of influential Arab tribes for the transitional authorities. With the exception of Al-Shaddadeh, much of the southern outskirts of Hasakah province also came under the control of the transitional government ([Etana Syria, 20 January 2026](#); see also: [Schmidinger, 23 January 2026](#)).

According to Syria expert Charles Lister, isolated crimes were committed by government troops and Kurdish militiamen during the offensive. There are confirmed cases of desecration of corpses, the destruction of an SDF cemetery and the use of unguided munitions in civilian areas by the Syrian army. At the same time, Kurdish fighters are accused of killing nearly 20 civilians with sniper fire and carrying out several extrajudicial executions ([MEI, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Ceasefire and further agreements

On 18 January, representatives of the transitional government and the SDF agreed on a ceasefire, which was followed by fighting ([Al Jazeera, 20 January 2026](#)). On 24 January, the ceasefire was extended for another 15 days, with a call for the SDF to lay down its arms and present a plan for integration into the Syrian army ([Reuters, 24 January 2026](#)). Even during this agreed ceasefire, there were mutual attacks ([Der Standard, 26 January 2026](#), [The National, 29. Jänner 2026](#)). On 29 January, for example, Syrian military drones carried out attacks on SDF positions in the vicinity of the Al Qahtaniyah subdistrict in Hasakah Province ([Long War Journal, 29. Jänner 2026](#)). On 30 January, the two sides agreed on a comprehensive agreement for the gradual integration of Kurdish military and civilian institutions into the state ([France 24, 2 February 2026](#); see also: [Reuters, 2](#)

[February 2026](#)). In a circular published on February 16, the Syrian Ministry of the Interior set a deadline of the end of February 2026 for members of the SDF to legalize their status and lay down their arms. This can be done at registration centers in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, and Raqqa ([The New Arab, 16 February 2026](#)). At the same time, The New Arab reports that, as part of a ceasefire agreement, the SDF will be restructured into four brigades, one of which will be stationed around the city of Kobane and the other three in northeastern Syria ([The New Arab, 14 February 2026](#)). On 21 February, state media reported the appointment of Brigadier General Ziad Al-Ayesh as presidential envoy with the task of implementing the 29 January agreement with the SDF and overseeing the integration process ([Rudaw, 21 February 2026](#)). In March, the Syrian Ministry of Defence appoints Sipan Hamo, commander of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), as Deputy Minister of Defence for the eastern regions of the country ([Reuters, 10 March 2026](#)). Also in March, the transitional government and the SDF will begin exchanging their respective prisoners as part of their agreement of 29 January ([Rudaw, 10 March 2026](#)).). Also as part of the agreement, Syrian state media are reporting the organisation of the return of hundreds of displaced families to the city of Afrin Afrin ([Rudaw, 9 March 2026](#); also see: [ANF News, 10 March 2026](#)).

Control over prisons and IS prisoners

As a result of the fighting described above, suspected members of Islamic State (IS) escaped from a prison in Shaddadi. While the Syrian government reported that around 120 prisoners had escaped, the SDF put the number at 1,500. The Syrian army imposed a curfew on Shaddadi and launched search and arrest operations, in which, according to official figures, 81 people were recaptured. Further fighting and prison breaks were also reported in the city of Raqqa ([The Guardian, 20 January 2026](#)).

As part of the ceasefire, the Syrian army took control of the al-Hol camp, which houses thousands of people, mainly family members of IS members ([AP News, 25 January 2026](#)). The UN subsequently took over responsibility for camp management, but was still unable to enter the camp as of 22 January for security reasons ([Reuters, 22 January 2026](#)). In mid-February, humanitarian, diplomatic, and local sources told Al Jazeera that the number of residents in the main al-Hol camp had fallen dramatically. Reports on how people left the camp are contradictory. According to local sources, most Syrians from al-Hol returned to their home towns, while many foreigners traveled to the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo ([Al Jazeera, 17 February 2026](#)).

Reuters reported that the US had begun transferring IS prisoners from Syria to Iraq. The first transfers involved 150 people, with further transfers – of up to 7,000 prisoners – planned ([Reuters, 21 January 2026](#)).

According to the news platform Asharq Al-Awsat, attacks by IS have increased significantly since the SDF withdrew from the al-Hol camp. In the provinces of Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor in particular, there have been attacks by lone IS members against security forces ([Asharq Al-Awsat, 27 February 2026](#)).

Situation in Hasakah

The SDF continues to control predominantly Kurdish areas. Government troops did not enter these regions, in particular the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah in north-eastern Syria and Kobane in the province of Aleppo near the Turkish border. The background to this are ongoing negotiations on the future administration of these areas and the return of state institutions. According to the Syrian news website Enab Baladi, both sides are preparing for further possible combat operations. Both the SDF and pro-government forces moved military reinforcements to the contact lines south of Hasakah, while the SDF expanded its positions, continued patrols and raids in the city districts, and converted a civilian hospital into a military hospital ([Enab Baladi, 24 January 2026](#)). On 2 February, journalists present at the scene reported that a convoy of government vehicles had entered the city of Hasakah as a result of the agreement of 30 January described above ([France 24, 2 February 2026](#); [Reuters, 2 February 2026](#)). The following day, Syrian government forces entered the city of Qamishli. ([Asharq Al-Awsat, 3 February 2026](#)). On 10 February, the Syrian army began handing over command in parts of Hasakah to the internal Syrian security forces ([Welat, 11 February 2026](#)), while at the same time the SDF withdrew from the frontlines in the south of the city of Hakah as part of an agreement between the two parties to the conflict and deployed its own internal security forces (Asaish) in the areas ([Kurd Press, 11 February 2026](#)). At the same time, The New Arab reports that, as part of a ceasefire agreement, the SDF will be restructured into four brigades, one of which will be stationed around the city of Kobane and the other three in northeastern Syria ([SOHR, 16 February 2026](#)). On 21 February, the Syrian authorities took over the administration of Qamishli Airport ([Al-Arabiya, 22 February 2026](#)).

On 5 February, US forces withdrew from the Al-Shaddadi base in Hasakah province ([The New Arab, 5 February 2026](#)). On 21 February, the US-led coalition began evacuating the Qasrak military base ([Shafaq News, 21 February 2026](#)).

At the beginning of March, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that 116,900 internally displaced persons remain displaced in 165 communities in the provinces of Aleppo and Hasakah. Furthermore, the failure of critical infrastructure is hampering basic services. Frequent power cuts are affecting water stations and medical care. At the same time, some important road links between the city of Hasakah and the provinces of Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor

were reopened after around 40 days of closure ([UN OCHA, 8 March 2026](#), p. 1).

Situation in Kobane (also known as Ain al-Arab)

The city of Kobane, which is predominantly inhabited by Kurds, is surrounded by the Turkish border to the north and by pro-government forces on all other sides. It is home to numerous internally displaced persons as a result of the recent fighting and has become a humanitarian hotspot. Kurdish forces accused the Syrian army of besieging the city, and activists warned of a humanitarian crisis due to shortages of food, water and electricity. Following the extension of the ceasefire on 24 January, two humanitarian corridors were established and a United Nations humanitarian convoy reached the city ([DW, 25 January 2026](#); see also: [France 24, 25 January 2026](#)). The New Arab reported on 29 January that hundreds of armed Iraqi Kurds had travelled to Hasakah province as volunteers over the previous two days ([The New Arab, 29. Jänner 2026](#)). The Kurdish news website ANF News reported on 5 February that Kobane had been under siege for 17 days. Some basic foodstuffs were no longer available and others were running low, as were medicines and medical supplies. The above-mentioned agreement between the transitional government and the SDF had provided for the lifting of the siege, but was not being implemented. ([ANF News, 5 February 2026](#)). According to Kurdish media and NGOs, Kobane continues to be besieged by the armed forces of the Syrian transitional government in mid-February 2026, which has a negative impact on health services. Also, there are only two hours of electricity per day, and the siege has led to a drastic increase in the price of food and heating oil ([Kurdistan 24, 11 February 2026](#); see also: [STJ, 11 February 2026](#); [Kurdistan 24, 15 February 2026](#)). During the same week, a UN team conducted a fact-finding mission in the city and confirmed that basic services were severely affected by the current situation. Goods and fuel were reaching the city, but not in the quantities needed ([UN, 10 February 2026](#)). On 21 February, SOHR reported human rights violations by government forces and allied armed groups in the predominantly Kurdish areas of northern Syria in the rural areas around Kobane. According to local sources, civilians were shot at directly, the body of a young man was left lying in public for two weeks, and a funeral was prevented. In addition, civilians' mobile phones and other property (such as combine harvesters and trucks) were confiscated ([SOHR, 21 February 2026](#)). At the end of February, Kurdish news reports announced the start of the integration process of the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) of the Kobane region into the Syrian Ministry of the Interior ([Kurdistan 24, 27 February 2026](#)). As of 11 March 2026, the city of Kobane has been under siege for over 50 days. According to the co-chair of the municipal health authority, Ahmad Mahmoud, there is a shortage of medicines and much of the medical equipment has broken down ([ANHA, 11 March 2026](#)).

Associated documents

12 March 2026 | [ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Syrian Arab Republic

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

[Informationssammlung zu Entwicklungen rund um die SDF und die kurdisch-geführten Gebiete](#) (Periodical Report, German)

de

ID 2137889

Document ID 2137888 Update of

19 February 2026 | [ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Syrian Arab Republic

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

[Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas](#) (Periodical Report, English)

en

ID 2137010

ecoi.net description:

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

Country:

Syrian Arab Republic

Source:

[ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Published:

12 March 2026

Document type:
Periodical Report

Language:
English

Available on ecoi.net since:
12 March 2026

Document ID:
2137888

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(ACCORD)		

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

